

FAQs

These Questions and Answers have been provided to give an indication of what happens in severe winter weather conditions; they are not intended as being a statement of policy. Each day is different and the Council has to be able to react accordingly.

SALTING THE ROAD

Q What does the Council do when the roads are likely to be affected by snow or ice?

A The Council officers monitor the weather forecasts over the winter period. The detail that they get is more than is seen on the TV and includes for predictions of road temperatures over a period of time. The officers are then able to make better decisions at when is the best time for the gritters to go out. Like any forecast they can be wrong. The weather is still not as predictable as we would all like it.

Q Which roads does the Council treat and why?

A The Council seeks to maintain as its first priority the main roads running through the Borough. They enable access to the national network and help ensure the overall flow of traffic. Subject to resources we then focus our attention on the secondary routes. The details of which roads are salted are available on the Council website.

If we are confident with these routes, we will then look to work to address problems within the community residential areas.

Q Why does the Council not put out more salt bins?

A The Council has a number of salt bins throughout the Borough at key sites. There is a limit as to how many we can put out as we have to be able to maintain them at times of need. Keeping the bins stocked takes two teams all day. The salt is there for road users to use on the highway in times of need.

When the salt bins are not in use they are a target for vandals and care is therefore given in the decision as to where to locate bins. The location of bins and how they are selected can be found on the Council website.

Q How is salt applied and how does it work?

A The Council employs Ringway and they have 3 vehicles and generally, depending on the weather, salt is laid at minimum spread rate of either 10 or 20 grammes/metre.

The salt works by lowering the freezing point of water and it needs some vehicle movement on it to make it effective.

Q Where does the salt come from?

A Our stockpile is in a depot in Bagshot. That stock is normally replenished from quarries in Cheshire.

Q How much stock does the Council have and what happens if it runs out?

A We stock for normal winter maintenance and we would usually have enough to meet normal conditions as the stock would be replenished on an ongoing basis.

When we experience a period of abnormal conditions that affect many parts of the country, then getting restocked becomes more difficult. Under those conditions we may only have 3 or 4 days' supply to deal with the worst conditions assuming no respite.

If supplies run out, it is possible to apply sand, but this is not the most effective way to deal with the problem.

Q What about snowploughs?

A In urban areas they are usually of little use. They work best in rural roads and where there is a reasonable depth of snow. The plough cannot be set too low because it would damage the road.

Q How much does it cost?

A The cost of salting the roads varies according to rates of spread and times of application - it costs more on Sunday than on Monday.

In round numbers costs vary from £1,500 to £2,000 a time to salt just the primary route network once. It costs approximately £1,000 to salt the secondary route network.

SALTING OR CLEARING OTHER AREAS

Q What about paths and cycleways?

A The Council does not have the ability to salt all footpaths. The resources are focused on the town centre followed by the estate shopping areas. Cycleways may benefit from the salting of the road but otherwise they are not salted. Where we can we will look to salt or clear underpass areas.

Q What about the town centre and neighbourhood shopping areas?

A Every effort is made to keep these areas usable.

Q Does the Council help in other areas?

A No, the Council can only deploy its resources to deal with the highways and to clear Council-owned offices and its residential homes.

Q Who co-ordinates all of this?

A Staff from the highway maintenance team co-ordinate the day-to-day operations. In extreme weather conditions Government Office of the South East becomes involved and through our emergency planning role seeks daily reports of progress and salt levels so that they can report back to government.

Q Is there anything I can do to help myself at home?

A Be aware of the local forecast and road conditions by listening to the radio, watching the TV or using the internet. Take precautions to grit/clear your own paths/driveways where appropriate and clear snow from your car before using. If your drive is usually affected by snow and ice get some salt supplies in advance. They are often available from builders' merchants or garden centres - but don't leave it too late!